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STUDIES IN - - - - PATHUPPATTU

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V. KANDASWAMI MUDALIAR, B.A., L.T.

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STUDIES IN PATHUPPATTU

V. KANDASWAMI MUDALIAR,

(PAINTER POET)

(*Author of Pearls*, நக்கீரர். கபிலர், சங்க காலத் தமிழ்நாடு)

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INTRODUCTION

Pathuppattu (The Ten Idylls), an ancient Tamil Classic of 3152 lines by eight authors, belongs to the last Sangam (Academy) period of about the second century of the Christian era. It is a work of supreme beauty, colour and rhythm. It is not vitiated like the wild descriptions of the later Tamil poets, but it is a revelation of the purity and loftiness of the early poetic art of the Tamils.

For reasons unknown and unknowable it is a closed book to most of the Tamil graduates of our University, and to not a few of our Tamil Vidwans. Except for its Sandhi, which can be mastered with a little effort, and for a few uncommon words, it is not beyond the reach of the appreciation and the enjoyment of Tamilians. While every graduate of our University leaves its portals with a knowledge of one or three of Shakespeare's dramas, why should not the Tamil graduate be possessed with a similar knowledge of at least two or three of these Ten Idylls? The least of Shakespeare's dramas has at least 2,400 lines, of at least 500 unfamiliar words, birds, flowers and many foreign allusions, not to speak of its grammar.

These Ten Idylls are historical records like Shakespeare's dramas. If Shakespeare's 'Historical Plays' are not dry as dust records of the past, but a living history of flesh and blood clothed in the radiance of colour and beauty and tuned to the music of words, these Idylls are no less master-paintings of the ancient past wrought in the harmony of Tamil words. That it is hard for the ordinary reader to easily understand and fully appreciate these songs is but a ghost-fright of Pandits and students.

In these pen-pictures of mine readers will find the confirmation of the common opinion that the East does not change quickly. I have not even for artistry introduced anything foreign, though I have sought to give them an artistic setting. My reference to western art, poetic and pictorial, is only to confirm that the vision of artists is the same, to whatever climes and times they may belong.

STUDIES IN THE TEN IDYLLS

STUDIES IN PATHUPPATTU

These sketches are based on the Ten Idylls (Pathuppattu) of the ancient Tamil classics.

Pathuppattu is to us, Tamils, what Homer is to the Greeks and what the Bible is to the Hebrews. The unchanging past treasured in the Hebrew Bible inspired English artists like William Hole and Holmun Hunt to make the dead past of the Jews a living present. From out of the stones and songs of Greece, Rome and Egypt artists like Alma Tadema, Lord Leighton and Griffenhagen have peopled gleaming marbles with fair women, live as moving flower-beds, and heroic men. I here sketch roughly a few vignettes from the Ten Idylls for the artists of vision and culture of the Tamil-land.

1. A ship, in her majesty of mast and sails, is anchored in still waters. A storm breaks, and the calm sea becomes a seething cauldron of whirlpool of waters. The towering mast sways and breaks and goes to shivers, and the sails wildly flutter and go to shreds. The ship breaks her

anchor, and the ruin of a ship helplessly heaves on a mad sea.

And so, a stately tusker in must tramples down to death its goader, throws down the mahout, breaks away the steel shackles of its hind legs, raises its lordly lusty trunk in the air, wildly trumpets like the thunder-clap of dark winter clouds; and to the apprising sound of conch, behind and before, madly cleaves through the crowded and the noisy streets of Madura town.

What a Miltonic simile for an elephant in must tearing through the surging streets of the Pandian capital!

2. The shepherdess (ஆய்மகள்) rises betimes to vend her refreshing drink—butter-milk—in the neighbouring village; churns the curd-cakes white and large as mushroon buds, fills her pot with butter-milk and places it, bespattered with the butter-milk, on the pad twisted of flower wreath on her head, and goes with the precious contents to the neighbouring village.

Her Kacham (breast band or sash), and her Thugil (saree or loin cloth) gleam with colour; her sleek, supple body has the sheen of burnished bronze; her path lies between green fields, and under trees dripping with the dew of the night.

The air is alive with the plaintive note of the koil (Cuckoo) in the tamarind tree, with the troll

of the hoopoe in the palm grove, with the incessant chirp of black-throated sparrows, and with the chorus of the nubian crowd of crows.

The fresh breath of the morning breeze is fragrant with the perfume of opening buds. The east reddens and frames the silhouetted figure of the damsel in soft crimson.

Her silken curly hair gleams sapphire-blue, her full bosom heaves, her golden pendants shine in the borrowed light of her dark liquid eyes, and in her graceful carriage and fawn-steps she looks the very picture of "Dawn."

The dusky imp—Krishna—was charmed by these. Who will not be?

3. Children, in their charm of supple roundness and graceful curves and arrayed like Adam, are wheeling their three-wheeled go-carts, whose passage is barred by the golden pendants of their mothers flung at fowls to scare them away from the drying paddy. And their sisters are pounding rice in the ground-level pound at the courtyard.

The rhythmic movements of their limbs, the sway of their fragile waists, and the rise and fall of their bosom, imprisoned within radiant Kachams, mark time with the chime of their bracelets and anklets, and to their h'ms, and to the thud-thuds of their pounders.

We have here a Baratha Natya of charming spontaneity without its artificial stiffness. They

stop at their work, their bodies gleam with honest sweat like newly-cast bronze, and their breasts heave with the healthful task.

All the time they are under the ken of one of their kind—a pet-fawn tethered under the shade of a wood-apple tree. They throw a handful of rice, and that is its reward for keeping careful watch. But it is mistaken, for an another pair of eyes is turned on one of these maids.

Love has its birth, not only in millet fields, on the banks of a river in flood, under a spreading banyan-tree, but also in a prosaic place like the courtyard of a house.

The harvest has been gathered and there is no more work for man and beast. The bulls are in their stalls, the cart wheels and ploughs are leaned against the white wall under low eaves, the farmer lad lingers at his work and casts an eager look.

There is a muffled whisper; the quarry stops at her work; and the chorus of laughter of her companions smites her with shame; and yet, she, by a stealthy look, gives hope to her distant lover.

4. 'The Last Watch of Hero'—a picture by Lord Leighton hangs in the Manchester Art Gallery. Every night Leander, the lover of Hero, swam the Hellespont to meet her. A tear trembles in her eyes as she watches from her bal-

cony, and it proves a hopeless dawn, for her dead lover is washed ashore. Byron, himself a great swimmer, negotiated the two-mile wide land-locked sea before writing his famous lines.

In Kurinchippattu (The Idyll of the Hills) the lover braves the dangers of a dark night. Tears don't tremble in his beloved's eyes, but they stream down the rounded citadels of her heart. She trembles like a peacock in the toils of a net, at the thought of prowling savage beasts, the knotted crocodile lurking in the marshes, the venemous serpents rustling in the leaves, the angry bisons of blood-shot eyes, the rogue elephants wildly wandering in the dark forest-path, the mazy tangle of creepers, and evil spirits and demons which beset his path.

We believe it did not end in a refusal, and the lover did not don orange robes and turn a monk. The days of Kalavu (whole-hearted surrender of hearts) and Karpu (conjugal loyalty) are gone, and things have come to the barter of cattle-market. Civilization!

5. A modern essayist writes a chapter on the Scotch-pie of minced meat and green peas for which Johnson had a partiality. Here are six lines on Puli-choru (sour-rice)—a savoury dish, for which we have similar sentiments.

The west is aglow. Trees stand dark and still against an opulent sky, the hush of fast

approaching night steals in with the setting sun. The Parpini (Brahmin matron) plays the hospitable host. She mixes her cooked-rice, thin as needles and white as mullai (jasmine creeper) buds with hot pomegranate juice and fresh butter, savours it with the tang of hot pepper and the flavour of fragrant black-neem leaves, and serves it with appetizing mavadu (mango) pickle. The poets of Pathuppattu are culinary artists and they serve us other confections like sponge-cake and sweet-puffs.

An artist of talent will make a picture even of a file of office-papers ; and the poet here makes poesy of such a commonplace thing as sour-rice, and this is art.

6. It was a day of Murugan's (a Saiva God) festivity. Flags and festoons, like many-coloured tongues of flame, illumined the ways, the byways, the roads, the cross-roads, the bunds of tanks and lakes, the banks of rivers, the village square, the moot, the open, the pillared hall of trees, the Kadamba tree in bloom, and diverse other places.

Flower-festoons and tassels spanned the aisle that led up to the altar. The Velan (priest) raised the Murugan's standard, embroidered with a cock, and bathed in mustard oil the deity under a trellised canopy of trembling leaves. The sacrificial ram was cut and lay in a pool of blood, and heap-baskets of rice, red with gore, were placed before

the deity. Flowers and gore-stained millet-grains were spread. Camphor and incense smoke rose in curls. In devotional obeisance the Velan prostrated, and the Kuramagals (hill-girls), in Kacham and Thugil, knelt and touched the holy ground with their foreheads, and chanted silently the sacred, propitiatory hymns to the illumination of doubters. Horn and trumpet rent the air and echoed in the distant hills.

The devoties sang praises of Murugan, calling upon his many names, as the child of the six heavenly nymphs, the son of the deity under the Banyan-tree, the begotten of the daughter of the Lord of snow-clad Kailas (Himalayas), the death-god of enemies, the child of Durga, the forest-nymph's son, the chieftain of the heavenly army, the learned of the learned, the matchless in war, the Appollo of unfading youth, the treasure of Brahmins, the lord of Thaivanai and Valli (two wives), the portly bull of heroes, the lord of unbending bow, the smiter of Thirupuram (three strong-holds of evil demons or monsters), the lord of heaven-reaching hills, the foot-light to the lost, the shelter of the forlorn, the indescribable and the unknowable.

7. The wandering minstrels, the Porunan and the Padini, he of heroic mould and she of sweet matronly grace, would go from village to village, and sing and dance of the rise and fall of

kingdoms, of the heroism of kings and warriors, of the arcadian idylls of lovers, and of the simple joys and sorrows of the people of Marutha (agricultural), Mullai (pastoral), Kurinchi (hill), Palai (forest) and Naidal (coastal) lands.

At the sight of highwaymen on the lonely forest-path, the Padini would sweep, rove and flick the strings of her yazh (harp), which would thaw their brazen hearts; and they, wrapped in the melody of music, would drop the weapons of their evil deeds.

Walking under the blazing sun, the Padini of curly silken tresses, of crescent-chaste forehead, of liquid eyes sparkling under arched brows, of faultless oval ears gleaming with gold pendants, of sweet lips touched with carmine and tender as crimson silk-cotton-tree leaf, of teeth like graded pearls, of musical voice, of rounded shoulders, of full firm breasts, of vanishing waist, of tapering legs, and of soft roseate feet, would avoid the burning road, and would seek even the uncertain shelter of leafless trees to cool her blistered feet.

Man and wife would stop by the wayside temple, and bow their heads in simple thanksgiving for their daily bread.

What are satin sarees and marble palaces before the joys of these? Ascetics will renounce their orange robes, become house-holders, and settle down to a life of married chastity.

8. In Rossetti's Blessed Damozel, we may stumble at one place

> "Until her bosom must have made
> The bar she leaned on warm."

But in the Ten Idylls we have many such places. Here is one of the sweet sisterhood.

It is a day of festivity, when the broad streets of Madura, the Pandian capital, surge with shouldering crowd, and echo with a babel of voices. The crowd thins in the evening, and a courtesan, eager for the lascivious embraces of lustful youths, threads her way through the melting crowd.

The Nayanar festival is loud with colour and music. Colourful flags, on storied houses, stream in the wind like the surf of a storm-tossed sea. The festive streets overflow with civet fragrance, with the chime of beaming silamboos (anklets), and with the silvery jingle of fllower-worked bracelets of gay-girls, fair in face as the sheen of their golden ear-rings.

The street echoes with the soft foot-fall of the courtesan, her muffled clap, and silver voice. She is radiant as the evening light reflected from golden statues, she is blonde to the embarrassment of passers-by, seductiye with the arrow-dart of mortal look, sleek and round with shoulders curved like hollow bamboo, bright with encircling Vanki (armlet), ensnaring in perfect rows

of teeth, gleaming with ink-black silken tresses, and voluptuous in her roseal maculation-mantled budding breasts.

When the honey is drained, she will desert the youths as the bees in the evening desert the honey-cup of flowers.

What a bundle of mischief! Visvamitras beware.

9. Like languid snow-white Thugil, (a white stuff fine as Dacca muslin) the foaming Vaigai river, in its freshes, came down the rugged hill, carrying in its passage Agil and Aram (fragrant woods), and thundered against the banks wearing away to the roots the bamboo bush starred with flowers. And the hills echoed from peak to peak with its roar, its whirl and its noisy surge. In the tremble of the sweeping river the beehives, golden as the setting sun crowning the hill-tops, spilt their honey; the palm-trees dropped their nuts; the fragile bananas broke and fell; the jack-tree shed its fruit and the Naga tree its fragrant flowers. The pepper plants, full with fruit, bowed their heads in the lashing waters. The tusker sprayed its dam with the cool waters of the rapids, the black-horned bull raised its head and bellowed to its mate, the hairy bear and the tusked boar fled to their dark caves, and the monkeys trembled with fright. Thus flowed the river, in her majesty of floods,

sweeping down everything in its passage, and spreading panic.

10. Clothed in summer foliage of variant shades of green and blue, hill rises behind hill, and the mountain village of thatched cottages, from a distance, looks like a herd of elephants at the foot of the hills.

The hillman's little son is feeding the pet-fawn under the vengai tree, and his sister is feeding the fowls before shutting them up.

In a corner of the cottage, a bed rises on four gleaming elephant tusks, and the hair mattress is spread over with a tiger skin; and in another corner stands a bed on four cork-screw horns of black-buck, and the silk-cotton mattress is counterpaned with a deer-skin. The drinking-water pot rests on a deer-horn tripod stand, and on the wall are the trophies of the hunt. Over the lintel of the door-way gleam two tusks of the wild-boar as a charm against evil spirits.

The woman of the house stands at the fence, and eagerly awaits the return of her lord from the hunt. She hears the distant bark of dogs, and at the turning of the road appears the hunter with his kill of a porcupine. She runs up, and helps off the load from his shoulder. Her loving eyes note the wounds on his body. Evidently man and beast had rolled on the ground, and the beast had wounded him with its quills. He

leans his bows in a corner and hangs up the arrow-full quiver. His beloved attends to his wounds, leans him against her with his head pillowed on her bosom, fans the smarting wound with a fan of peacock feathers, and sings away the pain with the song of their early love, when she and he met in the tall millet field.

The evening comes apace, the setting sun gilds the mountain peak with its parting glow of gold and crimson. The fast-coming night flings her mantle of velvet-black, and hangs up her myriad starlamps in the blue canopy of a sky. Hill and forest echo with the roar of beasts prowling for prey, with the twitter of night-birds, and the incessant drone of a thousand, little, winged insects.

They sit round their supper, and it tastes sweeter for the adventure; and in the morning the hunter wakes up none the worse for the hunt.

11. Persia, Greece, Rome, Egypt and the Tamil-land had their chariots and their chariot races, but to-day they have almost vanished from the face of this fair earth. Old-time athletic grace of charioteer and car may never come back. In our own land chariots have an East-end complexion; and the charioteer is socially tabooed. Who will restore them to their lost place of honour?

The streets of Madura echo with the rumble of chariot-wheels and the trample of prancing horses. Youths of rank and Appollo's grace, dressed in gold-brocaded Kachams (scarves), pink as gorgeous clouds of sunset, in girdles and gold-hafted swords and in gleaming Veerak-kazhal (hero anklets) on their indurated ankles, drive to racing-wind speed their chariots. Their scarves flutter in the wind, the whips in golden bands and crimson tassels rattle in their sockets, and the neem-leaf and sengalineer (water-lily) garlands of the charioteer mark time to the clip-clop-clep of the racing horses.

What equestrian grace of curves! What slender grace of chariot and charioteer, as he in slim litheness drives the car! It is reminiscent of the speed and colour of a Roman chariot race.

12. The rains cease; cloud on cloud rolls away to other skies, and the sun shines from the liquid-blue heavens. Field and grove ripple with the waters of the freshes and trees drip with rain. Birds leave their shelter, perch on trees, dry their wings and tune their songs.

The foaming waters of the Kaviri river in flood rush into the embraces of the purple sea, like fleecy clouds resting on purple peaks of hills; the sanguine waters of the freshes mingle with the towering waves of the dark sea, like an infant fair at it mother's bosom.

The fishers leave their homes to the river bank; fishes jubilantly frolic in the freshes; and the fishers sweep away the tangle of Valli-creeper (water-lily); the water-fowls nestling among the rushes desert their liquid beds; and the anglers throw their lines and patiently wait and watch on the bank for the lusty Varal and Valai fish. The Valai nibbles away the bait, scared though by the trembling shadow of rod and line in the ripples, aflame with the mirrored red-lotus. They wend their haul in the neighbouring village, and the women of the village dress the fish under trees from which crows call to their kind to share the offal.

13. A shandy day—it is to us what a Fair is to the peoples of the west. Women don their best, deck their raven tresses with flowers, and go to the shandy in their colourful array of Kacham and Thugil, and to the jingle of their anklets and wristlets, while their full bosoms heave and fall in answering motion to their lively fawn-steps.

The booths are full, and the market-place is heaped with the products of hill and dale, the plains and sea-sides, and surges with the noisy barter of sellers and buyers. Millet, paddy and ragi gleam in pyramids of lavender-green, golden-yellow and Indian-red; yam, beet-root and such hill products lie in colourful heaps; motley-coloured pulses rise like towering cones from their

heap-baskets ; like a sheaf of lances sugar-cane bundles stand leaned against trees, walls and the low eaves of the booths ; the ringing voices of children echo round the booths where confections, peas, and force, hot from the oven, are exposed for sale ; the whispering buzz of bees and flies surge round the jack-fruits, bananas and mangoes that lie in heaps ; damsels of youthful charm and matronly grace higgle and barter in their sweet, silvern speech, round the bangle, and bead sellers ; crying at the top of their voice the virtues and values of their goods, the hawkers vend their stuff; flower-girls move from booth to booth filling the air with the many fragrances of Mullai, Malli, Arali, Shanbagam, Magudam and Aloes. Thus is the shandy loud with colour and fragrance.

Outside the market-place, the salt vendors are seated before their white heaps of salt ; and the noise of busy barter mingles with the laughter of children who are playing hide-and-seek among the maze of carts parked wheel to wheel. The bullocks tethered to the shafts idly munch. The wives of the salt merchants light their fire to cook the night's supper. The froth-covered black pots, in the embraces of golden tongues of flame, hiss with the boiling rice.

The past is not dead but is with us to-day. You will see this sight on any shandy evening. 'What poetry is here? I see it every night in

my father's house.' That is what the housemaid said to her mistress, when she returned Burns' 'Cotter's Saturday Night' after reading through it overnight. The function of poetic art is also a realism of simplicity, and we have it here.

14. "Cossack Commanders cannonading come,
Dealing destruction's devasting doom."

War is the same to-day as in the distant past. It leaves in its wake ruined cities and devastated fields.

The invading host of man and beast raise a tumult which echoes in the very heavens. Arrows rain like silver showers, gaily visored war-elephants wallow in the mire of their fragrant ochar, and wildly sweep the battlefield spreading carnage; battling horse and man raise a cloud of sanguine dust. Horn and conch peal loud blasts, field and fortress stand faded and fallen, and man and beast perish.

The ever-green fields are a prey to hungry flames, which turn flourishing cities into wild wastes. Wild beasts stalk where sheep and cow peacefully nibbled the grass. In the fertile fields which gleamed with Sengalineer-flowers (water-lilies), rushes grow to the overshadowing height of elephants, and bristly boar and sow wallow in fields where stately bulls peacefully turned the soil.

The assembly halls no longer ring with the lore of the learned, but echo with the dance-steps of demonesses of fiery eyes and beastly paws. The ominous wail of the horned owl and its mate echoes in the granaries which are now char-heaps.

In the crimson field of carnage, headless corpses time with the dance of the demoness that has gorged on the gory carcasses of tuskers. On severed heads arranged like an oven, the demon-cook prepares the sacrificial rice in a pot of slain warriors, as a blood-offering to steel the arms of soldiers not to turn from the field of war.

War then as now had its horrors!

15. "Behold the lilies of fields, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like these." We have a whole garden of such fairy flowers in the Ten-Idylls and here are a few.

When dark winter picked out the trailing Peeram (fluted gourd) and Musundai with stars of gold and silver, when Kayam bejewelled the sand-dunes with its blue flowers, when Kondrai (gold Mohur) shed its showers of gold, when Kodal blushed like the roseate fingers of a fair hand, when leafy Thorai was aflame with flowers, scarlet as blood, when Naidal gleamed like the touch of blue-iridiscence on the neck of the peacock, when Musundai hung its spindle-like flowers, when aloe hung its swan-like flowers,

when Serunthi (Kondrai) shed its shower of gold, when Mundagam was bejewelled with sapphire flowers, when Punnai was covered with its pearl-drop buds........ ...

16. *Maruthaland*:—Rising from the distant misty mountains, the Vaigai river, carrying on its bosom flowers of varied hues, flows like a flower-garland between rippled sand-banks. Towering trees are jubilant with troops of monkeys, and peacocks spread their trains of opulent colours, and amorously dance to their mates.

The sugar-cane press tunes its monotonous cricket-drone; the amoebean strain of man and woman at weeding, the clamour of inebriate men rescuing the aged bulls caught in the slough of fields, the loud drum-beat rustle of wind-swept corn-fields mingle with the hum of festivity and with the patter of rain from the cloud-crowned peak of Parankundram.

Fishers in peaked wicker-hats sweep away the tangle of Valli-creeper to the flight of terns nestled in reeds, and cast their nets. They vend their haul in the village on the bank of the river, and crows, from trees under which the women are dressing the fish, call to their kind to share the offal.

Mullailand:—Golden stag and hind gambol gracefully amidst millet fields ready for the scythe, amidst gingelly-plant grown black for harvest,

and black-stalked ripe ragi rustling in the wind.

Sheep and cow peacefully graze on the green meadow. The shepherd lad cuts a reed from the river bank, gathers twigs, lights a fire, pulls out from it a fire-brand and burns holes in the reed; and then he plays on it the song of his new-born love.

A shepherd lass is hastening her foot-steps home. The call of Murali falls on her ears, when she spies the lover under the pillared banyan-tree. His tune grows clearer and sweeter, and he stands at the edge of the meadow. As she passes him by she bows her head in maiden modesty; an artful smile plays on her lips, and her bosom, imprisoned within the folds of her kacham, heaves. To the shepherd lad the hour to ask for 'only a word' has not come.

When golden Kondrai (Gold Mohur) over-shadowing the rocks carpets them with yellow flowers, when the meadows don their green and sapphire-blue shawls, when neidal flowers, water-lily, in the tangle of leaves, gleam as sapphires, in the delves, the tumult of Salli-kattu (bull-baiting) rises like the surge of voices in a devil dance square.

Kurinchiland :—Against a pillared mound of clipped Agil (agila) and Aram (sandalwood), Thorainel (paddy) waves in the wind, and the

long-stalked mustard plants raise their heads towering higher than the five-fold paddy. Varied hill products, like ginger, turmeric and pepper stand in colourful heaps, ready for the market.

The noise of watchers who scare away parrots from the millet-fields, the cry of hillmen who chase away the heifers from fields where bean-hoppers shed their coral-tinted nuts, the false alarm of 'Vengai, Vengal' (tiger, tiger) raised by gay girls gathering flowers of the Vengai-tree (Mimosa), the yell of hunters as they kill the wild-boar fallen in the trap-pits and the roar of tiger as it strikes down the white-tusked boar, mingle with the rush and the ripple of the mountain brook, and echo from hill to hill of the Kurinchi-land (mountain country).

Palailand :—In the hill-girted Palai-land forest land), when the bamboo forest is ablaze with tongues of golden flame, when smoke rises in whirling clouds, and when the hills ring with the crackling sound of burning bomboo, herds of elephants flee to other lairs. The heavy thud of their marching feet, and the trumpet-peal of their distressed cry blend in sight and sound with the forest on fire. Stretches of grass-land turned golden in summer lie like hay-ricks. The wild hot-wind of summer ruffles the deep waters of delves, and echoes like a boisterous sea.

Neidalland :—Ships, in their majesty of sails, laden with varied wealth of land and sea, from far and near, cast anchor day after day, and the ports and the warehouses of the sand-covered neidal-shores (sea-shores) are full with iridescent pearls of the deep, sounding, southern seas, with rolls of slender conch bangles, with sweet tamarind and heaps of white-salt brought by Barathas (merchants), with hoards of salt-fish brought by brawny fishers, with precious products of Yavana (Greek) land, and with the horses of Arabia.

17. *Adipperukku* (Freshes) :—White clouds, like unshorn flocks of sheep, drink of the waters of the deep, rise like herds of elephants, rest on the purple peaks of towering hills, thunder like bellowing bulls and shed their winter rains.

The mountain stream comes down the rugged hillside in sparkling cascades, and swells into a river overflowing its banks. The hills ring with the trumpet peal of frightened elephants, bees hum their jubilant songs round the honey-cups of flowers.

The banks of the river gleam like flower-beds with the gay holiday-attire of women and children, whose merriment mingles with the surge of the river. Food offerings are cooked, flowers and yellow rice are thrown into the river, and lighted camphor is floated on the rushing waters of the winter-freshes.

The gallants' gaieties and the merry laughter of their courtisans, of rounded physical perfections, frolicking in the sanguine waters to the tangle of the garlands, mix with the heedless rush of waters.

18. *Fishers*:—Stars shed their light from the skyey canopy. Wave on wave rolls, tumbles, and the spume heaves and ebbs like the fall and rise of the white manes of milk-white horses. Lights burn in huts huddled like rocks, and the brown brawny fishers put out their catamarans to the call of the deeps. They cast their nets and gather the silvery harvests of the sapphire sea.

The foaming waters of the rising waves spend their fury on the golden sand dunes on the shore. The dawn comes, and the fishermen dry their nets on the sun-bleached sands, and the drying nets look like moon-shadows. The fishing rods idly peep from the thatches of huts, whose walls are abright with bands of red and white.

Boar and sow, with their squeaking litter, wander for forage; fowls pick their food in the dust-shoot, and an eagle, flying overhead, casts an ominous shadow, when the mother-hen sounds her warning cluck-cluck, and the fluffy chicks run to the shelter of her wings.

The evening comes, when children gather shells, and build sand-fortresses.

19. *Winter* :—Fold on fold, winter clouds girdle the blue rising hills, and pour their generous rains. Field and grove grow jubilant; coming ears of corn bow their heads in the fast-falling rains, and the face of the earth is veiled in the gossamer coverlet of sparkling rain-drops. But man and beast are smitten with cold.

The cattle heed not the wet grass under their feet; milch-cows spurn to feed their calves; horses desert their stalls for the moonlit open and neigh in grief; monkeys chatter with cold; birds drop dead, smitten with the cold blast; and pigeons, discerning not day from night, idly rest in the loft.

The shepherds shoulder their crooks, draw their mantles closer round them, and drive their sheep and cow to sunny pastures. The shuffle of their feet, their bleats, baas and moos die in the distance, and they vanish in the rain-mist that rises from the ground.

Lights appear one by one, like stars, in the booths of the evening bazaar, when women of modest mien, pliant grace, liquid eyes and rounded shoulders light their lamps, and worship their home-gods with offerings of rice and flowers.

While in stately mansions, women of rank dry their silken hair and warm their hands in the smoke and fire of Agil (agila) and Aram (sandal). Dancers warm the winter-warped harp-strings

against their budding breasts, and tune them to the music of their dance-steps, and sweet-hearts languish for their absent lovers.

20. *The Pandian Queen:* Softly outlined against a dark winter sky, the stately palace of tower and dome, minaret and cupola rose like a rock-cut temple of majestic proportions. Its spacious halls and winding carridors of sculptured bracket and balustrde, plinth and pilaster, crown and cornice, eaves and entablatures rose on stately pillars of polished black-stone flaming like sapphire. Flags and festoons of varied colours spanned like rainbow the storied palace.

The walls of the Queen's chamber, to half their heights, were richly sculptured with the battle confusion of man and beast rolling in the dust, and the upper half of the walls was stuccoed, in alabaster white, with a frescoed border of water-lilies in various states of bloom.

In a bed, rich in carver's cunning craft and upholosterers colourful art, lay the Queen distraught withgrief for her absent lord. On her bed of swans-down and within a curtain of lacework of pearls laythe Queen with thoughts of the King.

She had discorded her flower-worked diaphanous Thugil for a red Kalingan which looked beautiful even in its dye of dust. Her Thali, in its silken cord, lorn of the company of peerless pearl and King, lay limp between her full rounded

breasts. On her wasted wrists conch bangles travelled up and down instead of regal golden bracelets. Her unkempt silken hair strayed in wanton ringlets, about her ears and her clouded foreheads.

Maid-attendants of willowy waist and swinging gait flitted from room to room, and trimmed the dying flames into burning radiance. Full-breasted and slender-waisted chamber-maids caressed the unadorned feet of the Queen, while brunette nurses sought to comfort the Queen that her lord's triumphant return was near. But the Queen in her woe only sighed. When her dark eyes wandered to the highly polished roof of the bed borne on slender shafts, she wished for the wedded bliss of Rohini of the Zodiac painted on it. When her anxious nurses again sought to cheer her, only tears softly trickled in perennial pearls from the end of her blue hyacinth eyes.

21. *Nayanar Festival :* The Nayanar festival is loud with colour, sound and fragrance. The festive streets of Madura overflow with civet fragrance and with the chime of beaming silamboos (anklets), and dazzling bracelets of gay girls that move from place to place in soft and measured fawn-steps. The music of evening worship sweetly surges in the crowded streets. On storied mansions colourful flags stream in the wind like the storm-tossed surf of the sea. Damsels of

moon-beam faces watch the moving procession of the deity, from behind the curtain of wildly floating banners.

The streets, littered with opening buds of Mullai (jasmine), overflow with their fragrance. When the crowd of festivity thins, the streets ring with the silver chime of the anklets of courtesans who in ambling gait walk the streets.

For the captivation of the night they set there wandering jewellery and deck themselves with flowers fresh with the fragrance of buds which open to the chorus of bees. In their mansions surging with the perfume of flowers, and abright with lamp-lights, courtesans, ravishingly fair as heavenly nymphs, spend the night with youths of rank who, like birds that go in quest of fruit-laden trees, gather round them.

At the call of the rippling waters of the Vaigai under the magic spell of silvery moon-beams, gay girls and gallants gambol in its cool waters. After their amorous frolic in the crystal-clear waters of the river, they rest on sand-dunes, tune their harps and sound their tambourines to the measured steps of Thunangai (minuet) dance of man and woman. Pearl-winged bees hum their flatteries at the portals of opening buds and desert them after draining the pollen-lined cups of their honey ; and so man and woman part after their night's gaieties.

22. *Thiruparankundram*:—The temple bells ring the hour of evening worship. Orange-robed asceties emaciated with penance, crowned with silver hair peaked up like the right-whorled conch and deeply learned in Vedic-lore enter the porch borne on sculptured pillars. The faces of these worshippers beam with the bliss that comes through a mastery of their senses.

Tender mango-leaf complexioned lyre girls, fair as heavenly nymphs, clad in immaculate Thugil, girdled in a chain-work of gems, press their harp-strings against their firm, warm breasts and tune them to the harmony of nautch girls. The chant of mantras and vedas of priests and ascetics mingles with the liquid tone of harps, and with the tintinnabulation of the anklet bells of dancers.

A hundred flames of lamp and camphor illuminate the porch and the pillars, and the perfume of flowers and incense-smoke fills the sanctuary echoing with the toll of bells and beat of Murasu (drum) from time to time.

23. *Madura Ports*:— Stately ships laden with goods of great value spread their sails to the flap of streaming flags on their mast-heads, cleave through the rolling waves of the dark sea, canopied by clouds, and reach the shore to the welcome peal of drums. This fleet of vessels, lying at anchor with swollen dusky sails, looks like hills rising on hills in the misty distance.

The ports and the fisher-village echo with the rumble of the home-coming of these traffickers, with the roar of the waves of the stenchy sea of gambolling sharks, with the incessant drizzle in the Thalai (aloe) grove of pitcher-shaped flowers with the uproar of heavy-laden fish-boats grating on the shore and with the noisy barter of salt-vendors.

The Neidal (shore-board) fields echo with the cry of those who goad the bulls at the threshing ground, with the muffled ring of bells round the home-coming bulls, with the beat of flail which scatters the golden corn into broken rays of the radiant dawn, with the cry of those who scare away birds from the harvest field, with the amoebean strains of harvesters, and with the dance-steps of Baratha (fisher) maids on the sand-dunes set with sapphires of sparkling mundaga flowers and with the surge of festive voices.

24. *Madura Bazaars* :—As through an aeolian harp the wind sings through the open windows of sky-scraping storied houses that line the river-wide streets. The coming festivity is announced by beat of drums.

The jubilation of the festive crowds mixes with the tumultuous harmony of conch, drum and horn, and with the babel of the motley crowd of many lands. The morning and evening bazaar-streets are brilliant with the colourful flags of

the different booths. Festoons of temple-vizha (festival), flags commemorating the capture of enemy's forts, flags at toddy-shops in praise of their refreshing drink, flags of the assembly halls of the learned and ascetics flap in the wind like the distant gleam of the brook on the mountain-side.

The four-square bazaar-streets beam with colour, and ring with the barter of crowded traders and artisans, standing shoulder to shoulder and hip to hip. Weavers, great and small, spread their sarees in ripplefolds and hawk them; bangle-sellers fashion slender bangles out of conch, and slip them on the tender arms of fair customers to their tears; jewellers drill gems to beads, and string them into necklaces of sapphire, coral and pearl; gold-smiths keep on show their artistic ornaments fashioned out of purest gold; braziers barter their new wares for old ones; drapers do the Kachams to the latest fashion; flower-girls move about from booth to booth vending their flowers arranged in colourful-patterns in their flower-baskets; betel-leaf sellers hawk their tender leaves, their nuts soaked in fragrant juice, the chunam paste of fired conch, and the civet scented talkum dust of jewels, gold, sandal-wood; and camphor, agil, and aram sellers and keen-eyed artists finish up the crowd.

(PROSE STUDIES OF MY POEMS BASED ON SANGAM SONGS).

25. *The Pandian Princess*:—The Pandian Queen was dead. A dark cloud hung over minaret and tower, dome and cupola of the stately palace, and within the palace walls gloom prevailed. The King spent his leisure bemoaning his loss, and the Princess, his daughter, divided her time between her embroidery work and her pet-fawn. The music of harp and the tintinnabulations of dance steps jarred on her ears.

The King was resting on his divan and the Princess was at her embroidery. Leaf and tendril, flower and bud began to take shape as she plied her needle with her dainty fingers. And the pattern, worked in gold and silver thread and Pandian pearls, gleamed with silver and gold and the rainbow tints of the pearls. Sometimes her tear drops would mingle with the pearls of the embroidery.

On such a day the Page annouuced the visit of a trader from distant lands. To shake off their gloomy thoughts, the father and daughter went to welcome the merchant. And he made a deep obeisance before them and touched the feet of the King, when the King asked, "From what land do you come, and what precious things have you for show?"

"I am a native of Chola land and I come of a long line of merchants. I have travelled to Carthage, Tyre, Sidon, Athens and Arabia of the west, and to China, Burma, Eastern Islands and Ceylon of the east, and I bring precious stones, silk, perfumes, and metal-ware of these distant lands.

"These are gems mined out of the bowels of Burma hills; these are pearls and corals of the southern seas; these are silks of China; these are perfumes of Arabia; and these caskets wrought in coral and worked in metal are of Burma, China and of the land of the rising-sun," he said.

The Princess heaved a sigh and in the King's eye trembled a tear, for both thought of the departed Queen. The King said, "Show the Princess your careful collection of precious gems."

And the young trader of Chola-land laid before the princess one by one his gems, which by their radiance seemed to light the palace walls stuccoed in alabaster white; and her eyes, cheeks, throat and teeth seemed to gain an added glow.

The trader said, "These sapphires, rubies and emeralds are meet for the towering neck of a princess, are meet for the slender and slim wrists of a queen, and are meet for the dainty, tapering fingers of royal maids.

"These sapphires of liquid blue come from Ceylon; matchless though they may seem, they but fade before the deep blue eyes of the princess of southern shores; and their sheen grows dull before the raven tresses that fall down a queen's golden neck.

"This is a red-carbuncle rare in size and deep in its blood-red tint; but it lacks the live freshness of a princess' coral lips; hanging down the chaste forehead of a queen of moon-beam face it would cheer lonely hearts.

"These are emeralds of the tint of early summer leaves, and are clear as the limpid waters of a lake; but they grow flat before the bosom veins of an immaculate virgin princess.

"These are onyxes with blended shades of blue and black, but they cannot vie with the dark fawn-eye blue and black of a princess; these chalcedonies, bluish-white as the midnight moon, hie in shame before the beaming face of a princess.

"These are opals with tricks of colour, and yet sometimes vie with the pearl-teeth of one who smiles to chasten.

"This is an amethyst cup, violet and blue; touched by the pomegranate-bud lips of a princess the wine in it will perfume hearts."

The trader rose and bowed in deep obeisance before the Pandian Princess, chaste as mullai and

fair as pink lotus ; the ringlets of his falling hair touched the pink-marble feet of the Princess. With joined hands he bade farewell, when eye on eye lingered.

He parted with his priceless gem, and the Princess in lone heart departed.

Mullai—Belle

26. Early before dawn, in every hut of the peaceful Mullai-village, rose the muffled roar of the churning of the curd into buttermilk. The radiant agate lamp of Venus softly faded in the east. A bar of golden light in the east deepened to red, when the flocks of fleecy clouds of the eastern sky turned pink and faded. The shepherdesses of the village left, with the pots on their heads, to the neighbouring village to vend their buttermilk. The shepherds, with but a loin cloth and with gruel-pots in their hands, drove their cow and sheep to green pastures jewelled with the dew of the night.

In the Kurinchi-land hill rose behind hill in dark shadows. The rising sun smote the hill-tops with his golden-beams. The watch-dogs had hushed their barks and lay asleep with half-shut eyes. Cocks, on the roofs of the huts huddled at the foot of the hills, flapped their wings, arched their necks and sounded the clarion call of dawn. Hunters, who had all through night kept vigil

near the trap-pit by the water's edge, returned in twos with the shackled boar hanging by a pole on their shoulders. Netters and trappers returned with their catch of hare of drooping ears, and partridge, and man and woman went to the tall millet-field to keep watch for the day.

It was on such a day that the hill-chieftain's son went to the Mullai-chief to ask for the hand of his daughter. The lovers had met on the borders lying between the pasture-land and the hills, and each to each had surrendered to find love's fulfilment in a life of married chastity.

Through rich pastures where sheep and cow browsed and nibbled the green grass, sped the chariot drawn by a snow-white horse of silken mane. To the rattle of wheel and the clip-clop-clep of horse, the car entered the towering gateway of the Mullai-chief's mansion. The sound of car and steed fell on the ears of the Mullai-belle, and her father greeted him with a beaming smile, and welcomed him with open arms.

KURINCHI-LOVER = *K*; MULLAI-CHIEF = *M*.

M.—I bring greetings from my father-your brother-chief of the hills, and wishes from him for the prosperity of your pastures and kine.

K.—Welcome to you, the son of a brother-chief. How fare his hills and the millet

fields? and what news of his health and of his growing wealth do you bring?

M.—He is fresh of health, his lands flourish, and I hope to carry similar good news from you to my father. And I am now come on an errand to which I crave a father's hearing

K.—Yes, my son of the hills; with pleasure will I fulfil the wishes of your father-a warrior of might and renown.

M.—I have not come on his errand but on my own. Like the winter tide of mountain river it has been rising, like a sweet dream of a fragrant summer night it has perfumed my day's task, like the distant chime of your cow-bells it has filled my ears with music, like the green grass of your meadows it has nourished my hungering heart, and I seek it at your hands—it is the wedded fulfilment of my love for the belle of the Mullai-chief.

K.—You are the noble son of a noble father, you are a heroic son of a warrior of the hills. I am but a chief of peaceful Mullai-land, and my daughter is but a flower of my lawns. My broad lands and fair fields will yield their wealth only for toil from day to night. But you follow the deer on the rugged hills,

and hunt the tusked-boar at night. By taming the wild tusker your limbs have gained the grace and strength of steel, and you may not stoop to ploughing the field and breaking the bulls. Your broad shoulders are seamed with scars of war, your hands are indurated with the wield of the mighty weapons of war, and you are used to ploughing the battle field of gory dead. So, seek the hand of a daughter of the hills.

The Mullai-son made a deep obeisanee and parted—not in anger but with a deep resolve to win the Mullai-belle in the field of bull-baiting (Sallikattu).

The night came apace and mantled the earth in her sable hue, but it was not darker than the Mullai-belle's raven tresses; the moon rose in the rim of the pasture land, but it faded before the beam of her chaste forehead; the enamel cups of flowers dripped with the gathering dew of night, but they vainly vied with her tear-drops that rained on her heaving rounded breasts.

And she of faded fawn look and languid waist lay on her bed and tossed with grief. The lay of the cricket jarred on her ears, the cry of the owl pierced her heart like a dagger, the moan of a lonely dove seemed her dying dirge, and the fitful bark of dogs trolled like her funeral conch.

27. *Kattabomman—A border chieftain* :—Kattabomman was a warrior-chief who wielded lance and sword against his foemen and laid them low. His shoulders were broad, his chest was deep and his limbs were strong as steel. In his left hand he carried his bow mighty as Indra's, and in his right his lance surer than Murugan's. His sword of ivory hilt, wrought into leaves and worked in gold, hung by his side. His Kacham round his waist hung in graceful folds. His hero anklet marked time to his measured steps, and his pink scarf spangled in gold hung down his left shoulder and swept the ground. Garlands of pearls and evening mullai-buds swept his broad sandal-pasted shoulders.

The towering peaks of the western hills caught the molten gold of the setting sun. Peak answered peak the rumble of winter clouds. The mountain-river, coming down the hill in silver cascades, rushed and rammed against its banks, and flung on their sandy ripples forest flowers of varied tint and mould. The peacock furled its gaudy train and hied with fright to find a shelter, the monkeys chattered with cold, the tusked boar and the white-snouted bear fled to their dens, and the tusker raised its trunk and cried in distress for its absent dam. The swollen stream, raving mad in winter wantonness, felled palm and plantain on its banks.

Like Leander who swam the Hellespont to meet his beloved Hero, Kattabomman sought to ford the river to meet his sweet-heart in the mountain village on the other bank of the sea-wide river. He plunged into the river and buffeted the waters which carried uprooted agila and sandal-wood from the mountainside.

Forest and flood he left far behind and turned his foot-steps, wearied and slow, to the mountain village. The sky had lost its blush in the night that came with winter haste and breath. Hill and tree faded formless in the sky, now set with stars, silver and gold. Night birds twittered and glow-worms sparkled ; and owls hooted with the birth of light in every hamlet. The victor of many a battle and the warrior of many a heroic deed faltered. The eighth-day moon and her starry fays spread their silver mantle over field and farm, and Kattabomman, surging with passion, sighed. The earth lay still in the lap of night, and every human voice was hushed in sleep.

He reached the village, neared his sweetheart's home, stood in the shadow of the Vengai-tree in bloom, and whistled low. It fell on her ears like the wind-swept music of lyre. Her heart flew into a flutter of hope and the house-door softly jarred on his ears. And they, cheek to cheek and shoulder to shoulder, were in each other's warm embraces. With tears raining like

dew from the trembling petals of Kuvalai-flowers she said, "My heart is mine to make it thine, but my hand will be given to you, when on the bridal morn sire and dame seek to unite us in wedlock.

28. The Battle: (From my Epic—Mullai-muruval)

(Valai = வளை = conch; Vayir = வயிர் = bugle; Muzhavu = முழவு = drum; Aguli = ஆகுளி = small drum; Pandil = பாண்டில் = cymbal: Parai = பறை = tom-tom; Kodu = கோடு = horn; Murasu = முரசு = Kettle-drum.)

Led by chiefs heroic in mould, the swelling, stately, serried horde of the rich marutha-lands on the banks of the Vaigai river marched to battle, to the troll of Valai and the blast of Vayir.

To the thunder roar of Muzhavu and Aguli the horsemen host of Kurinchi-hills and dales marched to war, headed by stalwart chiefs, brawny of build and heroic of hearts.

The clang of Pandil and the beat of Parai surged in the army of brown, brawny, bristly band of the lands of deep stretchless sea, and their chieftains of lion's mien and tiger's girth led them.

The blast of bugle and the blare of Kodu echoed in the blue heavens, as fiery youths and valiant archers of the green pasture-lands marched to the field of battle, led by their chiefs of daring, dauntless gait.

To the beat of Parai and to the blast of Vayir the torrential horde of Palai-land marched to war under their chieftains dauntless in war.

Thus poured man and beast of the five-fold lands to the field of battle.

Amidst martial shout and Murasu's roar, pennons fair and bright, banners large and small, fluttered in the wind. The battle raged and the tumult rose, amidst the rolling rumble of speeding cars mingling with the trumpet peal of stately tuskers. The sanguine cloud of dust that rose through the trample of beast and man hid the sun. Arrows deadly sped in the sky with a whizzing whistle; car and steed, soldier and chief rolled in the dust mixed with gore, lance met lance, and broke and fell; to the battle cry of the bloody onslaught fierce foemen met, sword to sword, lance to lance and shield to shield.

On a field ploughed by lance and spear warriors lay gasping for breath. Keen-eyed vultures wheeled in the sky to swoop down on severed heads and limbs. The blushing sun hied in the west and the jackals' howl echoed in the sky.

29. Sevvilai (Lanka)

The island of Sevvilai rose, from the deep blue sea, like a peerless pearl. Its lofty palm-trees beckoned merchantmen from distant mains

to her shores. Her ports were huddled with bales of trade, and sheep and goat capered from bale to bale. The roaring sea of liquid blue girdled the pearl-heaps of the Southern-seas, and it looked like a rainbow spanning the winter sky. White-sailed vessels lay at anchor in its waters, which looked like a team of white steeds harnessed to their chariots.

The sea-gulls' songs ever mingled with the babble of traders and with the interminable roar of angry waves. The white-washed ware-houses girdled the shore like a heaving rampart.

The palace of Irulvannan rose in sculptured beauty of tower and mineret, dome and cupola, at whose towering gateway yaks of long fleecy coats gambolled with snow-white swans. The moats, deep and full, teemed with listless crocodiles.

The stately halls and the winding corridors of the palace rose high, borne on black-stone pillars. The walls were richly sculptured with battling tuskers, speeding cars and wounded warriors gasping for breath. These high walls reached the ceiling of the terrace panelled with black wood-work rich in diverse bud, leaf, and fruit. And the inner of the cupola was illumined, in silver and gold, with the Zodiac's constellations.

A flight of black-stone steps led up to the Queen's Chamber. And Manavathiral, the

Queen of Sevvilai lay within a curtain of a lace-work of pearls, on an ivory bed rich in carver's craft, and blazing in upholsterer's colourful art. She lay ruffled deep with thoughts of the impending war, and grief surged within her heart for Sita the Queen of Ayodhya. Tears in pearl-drops dripped at the end of her eyes. Maids of modest mien, slender grace and measured steps went from room to room and lighted the statue lamps. And brunette nurses consoled the woe-stirred Queen that all would end well and Sita would be restored to the broad shoulders of her virtuous lord, Rama.

NAPPOOTHANAR

30. *Field of War*: In Nakkeerar's Nedunal-vadai and in Nappoothanar's Mullaippattu we have descriptions of battlefield. The theme of both the songs is the same. Woebegone Queen, are distraught with grief for their absent Kings. While describing the woe of the Pandian Queen, Nakkeerar draws a vivid picture of the King's palace, and the bed-chamber and the bed of the Queen; he, with only a few masterly touches, paints the battle-ground; but the picture lacks clearness of outline and richness of colour, both of which are found in abundance in Poothanar's Mullaippattu.

In fifty lines of supreme artistic beauty, Nappoothanar sketches the battlefield, true and unmistakable to every detail.

Shakespeare is a truer historian, than chronologists of the country and peoples whom he describes; while history books are dry-as-dust chronologies of men and things, the dramatist of England is a painter of almost the highest order, and a historian of the truest and the liveliest kind. He had a large canvas to paint his pictures. But the eight authors of the ten Sangam-Songs, and others, besides, of the Sangam period were also artists who, like Shakespeare, have recorded the history of the Tamil people in vivid pictures, and their canvas was small, and yet within such a narrow limit they have done as much for the Tamil-land as the dramatist of the English tongue. I am not raising the Tamil-poets to a higher pedestal than him who saw the light of day in a cottage in Stratford-on-Avon; but, at the same time, it cannot be gainsaid, by impartial critics, that the Tamil singers soar to higher heights, and wander among clouds of a richer colouring. Shakespeare is a livelier painter of the birds of air and the flowers of the field than naturalists. Are we forbidden to speak, in the same breath, of our Tamil poets who flourished about or earlier than the second century of the Christian era?

We shall, in this short sketch of the genius of Nappoothanar, touch upon only a few of his gifts, though he himself has left behind only one song of a hundred and three lines.

Some of us who had lived through two great European wars have not even the ghost of an idea of what a modern battle-field is like; it is true we have read descriptions, and have seen pictures of modern warfare, but there are not many among us who can give as true a picture as Poothanar has given in Mullaippattu, and in such a parsimony of words of silver-toned music. It is for the reader to verify my statements by going through the original, for my purpose is to state in severe prose what he has done in measured music.

Encampment s There were sappers and miners then as now. They were forerunners and path-makers. They go in advance of the army, clear the ground of brambles and bushes, and raise a line of low-roofed huts for the reserve forces; and then enclose this with a live-rampart of Pidavam (a smelly plant). At the gateway of this enclosed ground, a war-tusker stands guard; its mind, too, is full of gloomy thoughts of war, and so it spurns the herbage at its feet and idly brushes its forehead with the leaves; and even the goad of the Mahout fails to persuade it to eat.

Between the regular field of engagement and this camp of reserves lies the camp of the fighting unit of lancers, bowmen, horsemen and war-elephants.

Tents are pitched for the lancers and the bowmen, which are divided into separate camps. The camp of the lancers is fenced round with their lances and their shields, to be quite within easy reach at the call of the bugle; and the camp of the bowmen is fenced round with their quiver-depending bows.

The King': Camp : A tent suited to the King is pitched away from these two forces. It has a room, within a room thus leaving a corridor, running round the King's sleeping apartment. The King's outer chamber is girdled by a strong tiger-leash chain; strong and stout wooden palings form the fence of the King's camp, while the cavalry and the tuskers form the outer-lines of guard.

Warrior-women followed the King to the field of war. They have poniards in their girdles, and they trim the flames of lamps, when they burn low. And besides, astrologers and wisemen wait on the King, and cheer him, from time to time, that the battle will end well, and he will live long.

The King's personal guards are mute Barbarians, who in turn are watched over by Milechas.

The King does not sleep, but lies troubled with thoughts of the morrow's success or defeat.

His thoughts travel to the field of battle where the steeds stand still, smitten with lance cuts, and where the tuskers stand, in woe, before their dissevered trunks rolling in the dust.

This completes the picture as painted by the poet.

Nappoothanar as an Artist: The following opening lines of the song reveal him as an artist that paints a glowing picture with a brush full-laden with colours.

> "In the short-lived freezing hours of a winter eve,
> Full with the cool waters of the song-surging seas,
> Fast-fleeing convoluting clouds soared high,
> And veered to the right of the towering blue hills,
> And girdled the stretchless earth from end to end,
> And poured down their silvery sheets of surging rains,
> Like libatory waters poured into the hands
> Of the stately, tall and dusky Vishnu, gleaming
> With the flaming disc and right whorled Sanka, white."

The burning sun and the crescent moon setting behind the blue hills, where the rain waters pour in cascades, suggested to the poet the simile of Vishnu with flaming discus and milk-white conch. This is really a colourful picture of blue hills, dark purple clouds, golden sun, and shadowy moon behind a silver screen of falling rains.

The victorious army returns home, and in the following few lines the poet shows his gift as a lively naturalist.

"It marched through the wide, red path of a thick forest,
Where on sand-dunes dark-blue Kaya bloomed bright,
Where Kondrai of dense leaves dropped its golden flowers,
Where Kodal bloomed like the fingers of a fair hand,
Where Thondri of dense bunches blushed blood-red,
Where the black-buck and doe of cork-screw horns gambolled,
Amidst rain-dowered fields where ear-laden ragi bowed."

A clever still life painter of flowers will blush, for these flowers are not still life studies, but they seem to have found tongue at the hands of the poet; and to emphasise the liveliness of the picture he paints a buck and a doe gambolling amidst ear-laden ragi. These swift-footed and dark-eyed creatures lend movement to the whole picture, which further down is emphasised by the closing lines,

"They marched faster than the fleetest of speeding horses,
And the clip-clop-clep of horses harnessed to cars,
Covered with the fame of war, rang sweet in the Queen's ears."

Besides movement we have, in these lines, the finishing touch of silvern music.

(The lines quoted are from my unpublished poems.)

31. *Nakkeeranar*: He that has written about the talent of Nappoothanar cannot refrain from

saying a word or two about the uncompromising critic of the last academy of poets. Like the French-Academy, there was probably a Tamil-Sangam. About many things of the ancient past of the Tamils one has to be wary and watchful. There is, in some of us, a tendency to credit myths as historical certainties. We have one such myth sedulously circulated among some of us, that Keeranar, as a critic, crossed swords with the very Siva, and that he was floored. The myth ends with Keeranar falling into the lotus-tank of Meenatchi-temple; this is amusing, as there was no lotus-tank in or about the first century A.D. But myths hide a grain of truth in a verbal heap of an ornate story, and the grain here is that Keeranar, the critic, would not yield to battle, though the adversary happened to be the very god-head.

And it is of such a Matthew Arnold—a critic and a poet—of the ancient Tamils that we are to speak, and bear in mind that Keeranar was a poet who was a critic, and an uncompromising critic that was also a poet. Some people might say that a critic cannot be a good poet; but there is Matthew Arnold's 'Strayed Reveller'—a Greek gem and an Apollo's lute. Manickanar's son was no less than the school-inspector, and his Nedunalvadai is both beautiful as a Greek gem and musical as an Apollo's lute.

One has but to read those few lines, descriptive of the Queen's bed, to be convinced. One, like me, may go into hysterics in praising the school-master's son for his poetic craft of a cabinet maker's and an upholsterer's art. "It is possible that I may exaggerate about his craftsmanship. I certainly hope that I do; for where there is no exaggeration there is no love, and where there is no love there is no understanding." But I may assure the reader that I am not raising him to a towering height over and above the other sangam poets.

I have a lurking feeling, at the back of my mind, that poets past and present, of east and west pursued some other craft or hobby or trade or pleasantry besides rhyming.

From the names, which some of the Tamil poets affected, it is obvious that they have been potters, traders, grocers, and others. There is nothing unusual except by the standard of many of our University-men.

Poets and painters stand apart by themselves, and the crafts which they affect are by themselves pleasantries, and yet, in spite of a staggering output of work, they seem to find and to have found time to indulge in hobbies.

Shakespeare was a good business-man, Tennyson was a gardener, Browning dabbled in plastic-art, Shelley was a chemist, Rossetti had

uncanny pets, besides being an artist, Morris opened a cabinet-shop of artistic furniture, and Scott measured ale.

Among artists Orpen (Sir William) delighted his friends with singing-birds of his own make, Leonardo was many things-a musician, a botanist, an ornithologist, a chemist and so on, and Cellini, that wizard of enamel-jewellery, could play on flute, and indulged with impunity in the hobby of committing cold-blooded murders, for which the moderns would give him the courtesy of a long rope round his neck.

Our long-robed vendors of law seem busier than they really are—refer to Chaucer—and yet they have leisure enough for political hobbies; our medicine-men, besides their pills, powders, plasters and palliatives, have their experimentations which bring a large profit to themselves, and sometimes to the undertaker; the ragged school-master is no longer tied to the forms, notes of lesson, curriculum, and make-believe preparations for make-believe inspections; and now, in this new era, their well-earned leisure does not hang heavily round their necks; for they have found political shibboleths, and have learnt the measured martial march with 'Onward Christian soldiers marching as to war,' on their lips; even school boys, through sweet pleasantries, have

found a fair diversion from the mournful monologue of school-masters.

In short, no man, from the time of his birth till the hour of last parting, is without a diversion. What about fair and honest profiteers? After satisfying the devil on earth, they book their passage to heaven by pious pilgrimages to Poroor; and they are not without their partners who have their (mamools) tips, recognised and unrecognised.

Reader, you and I have had our diversion, and let us pass on to Keeranar as a lover of artistic furniture. This was his hobby, while Kausiganar was a naturalist, Kapilar was a botanist, and Maruthanar was a Stevenson (R. L.)—but I am not sure if he had a donkey for his travelling companion, and a pocket-book in his satchel.

Though we cannot with certainty assert that Keeranar affected the hobby of artistic furniture-making, we can be sure that he was a connoisseur of it, and it is of him as such that I wish to speak.

"And the Queen lay in a far-famed bed built of tusks
Dropped by battling elephants, two-score years old,

* * *

Of such tusks, fair of grains and strong as steel, craftsmen,
Planing and fitting to size, knit the frame of bed,
Carved in leafy luxury: and the legs were wrought
In beauty of bosses, round, firm, and large like breasts

Of enceinte women; their shafts well turned and slender;
Their toes, strong and moulded shapely as garlic bulbs.

Then walled round the bed with a framework erect
And screwed up, from which hung, in threaded silk, laceworks
Of iridescent pearls; and the lying on frame
Was fitted with a framework of interlaced tapes
Gleaming in stripes, golden and black, like the silken
Coat of a tiger; and on it, in layers three,
Were a hair-mattress of many-coloured wool,
Soft and clear, appliqued bright with a scene
Of a tiger-hunt in forest thick, dark and wide;
And a soft mattress of petals of flowers fair;
And the topmost feather-bed of soft swansdown shed
During mating season; on this was spread, bleached white,
A starched sheet, enamelled with fresh fragrant petals."

Any modern furniture-maker can fashion, with the description given, the bed on which the Pandyan Queen slept. There is no half-way description, it is cut and clear to the minutest detail.

In the 'Eve of St. Agnes' by Keats we have a similar description of a bed on which Madeline slept, and we quote a few relevant lines to show the extraordinary parallelism of poetic expression and description between the two poets—Keats and Keeranar—who lived so far apart in time. Keats saw the light of day in the year 1795, and after a short life of twenty-six years passed away,

while Keeranar lived earlier than the second century of the Christian era.

"The arras, rich with horsemen, hawk, and hound,
Flutter'd in the besieging wind's uproar."

Here we have the hunting-scene, worked in coloured thread on the arras, while we have an appliqued hunting-scene on the mattress.

"A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,
All garlanded with carven imageries,
Of fruits and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass"

Compare this with the rich carving of the Queen's bed ; and this

"And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
In blanched linen, smooth, and lavender'd."

With the bleached and starched sheet, enamelled with fresh flowers, on which the Queen lay.

The son of a Madura schoolmaster, with equal skill, paints the King's palace from start to finish.

"Consulting the deities of the quarters, Silpis,
Learned in their lore, plotted with line a fair site
For a palace suited to the King's royalty,
When the two mark-pegs cast no shadow, when the Sun,
Spreading its radiant rays, careered to the west
In its ordained path, and stood at its zenith high."

* * *

"Soaring in mountain majesty, gleamed the palace,
Stoutly guarded, in colourful flags and festoons,
Like towering peaks of hills spanned by a rainbow.

Girdled by corridors borne on well-turned pillars,
Adamantine and gleaming in sapphire-blue sheen,
Rose the central hall of the fair stately mansion.
Its walls, to half the height, were stuccoed silver white,

And frescoed with a matchless border of the creeper
Of water-lily with flowers varied in bloom;
The other half was richly sculptured, and gleamed,
As high relief bronze work, in its chiselled beauty."
(The lines quoted are from my unpublished poem.)

Nathathanar (நத்தத்தனார்): He is the author of one of the ten Sangam-songs called 'A Short Lay of Minstrels' (சிறுபாணாற்றுப்படை). It is so called because of the lengh of the lines--269--as compared with 'A Long Lay of Minstrels' (பெரும்பாணாற்றுப் படை) of 500 lines. There are others who say that the words 'short and long' do not refer to the length of the lines, but to the minstrels who are classified as 'small and great'. We shall not, for the present, go into a discussion of the question, for our purpose is only an appreciation of the poem.

In this song, Nathathanar sings his praise of his patron, Prince–Nalliakkodan, who held sway over three-divisions of land, called kottams, in Thondaimandalam. In those early times there were three great Tamil Kingdoms of Chera, Chola and Pandian Kings; besides these three Kings there were other lesser chiefs or princes, called Kurunilamannars--குறுநிலமன்னர்கள், who ruled

over smaller domains. This Nalliakkodan was one such prince, and he was famous for his bounty; he was more bounteous than the other seven bountiful chiefs, then known to the Tamil-land and peoples.

In this poem the poet describes those seven bounteous chiefs and their country and gifts. It is for the reader to read through the original Tamil song for further information.

Nathathanar's Poetic Craft : What surprises a reader of the 'Ten-Idylls' is the extraordinary diversity in the treatment of a common theme; and Nathathanar's genius is his clarity of description. To achieve this, he piles simile on simile, and such a treatment does not pall on the reader, while on the other hand it adds to the richness of poetic art.

It is a convention among Tamil-poets to compare the tapering leg of a woman to the languid trunk of a cow-elephant; we ourselves felt the simile a little uncanny; and Nathathanar while following the conventional description modifies it,

> "She of well-turned, lusty, tapering legs,
> Like the drooping trunk of a cow-elephant
> Of ambling gait, walked warily."

And further down while describing her dark, knotted tresses, he mollifies the uncanny description of the woman's leg,

"Her hair was knotted like the flower bud
Of a plantain-tree that grows on hill-tops,
And the plantain tree, smooth, round and olive-hued,
Looked like the legs of a fair minstrel-girl."

Annotators interpret the word குறங்கு as thigh, but we prefer to interpret it as the whole leg, for this accords with the description given.

Here, under, is a description of the roseal-covered (தேமல் படர்ந்த) fair breast of the minstrel-girl.

"Her bejewelled, maculated breasts, fair,
Looked like golden Vengai-flowers, round which
Hummed banded-bees, drunk with their sweet honey;
And challenged the blooming Kongam-bud
In their love-awakening swelling charms."

For the shape and the fulness of the breast he compares it to the Kongam-bud, and for its roseal-maculations he compares it to Vengai-flowers round which banded-bees hum their flatteries; piling simile on simile—is it a trick or poetic craft? It is for the reader to judge; and we for ourselves think that the description gains in vividness and richness.

The poet is not content with two similia and further down there are the following lines.

"Her teeth were like the pearly drops falling
From breast-shaped kernels of palm-fruit clusters,
Rich with surging juice, sweet and clear;"

We are tempted to exclaim, "What a poetic-craft!"

We shall stop with one more instance of such piled up similia,

"Her falling tresses, anointed with oil,
Looked like a screen of dark, dense clouds
Descending to replenish the dry earth.
The peacocks that danced with their trains outspread,
Like the languid tresses of a damsel,
Were, at her graceful gait, smitten with shame,
And hid in one another's outspread train."

He who said, "If you have two coats, give one to your neighbour", with no small sadness of heart, said, "The poor are always with you."

Yes, the poor are still with us, without a cubit of cloth round their loins, and without a morsel of food. Under sun and shower, they toil from dawn to dusk, and drones live on their gathered honey. Foxes have holes, birds have nests, sheep have their pens, and cattle their stalls, but these immortal daughters and sons of God sleep on pavements with the star-spangled sky overhead!

The priest said to an indigent catechist—the preacher of God's gospel—that it was a privilege to share sorrow and suffering with the crucified Lord; and Vedhantists and Siddhantists consider the firm earth under our feet a maya (illusion)—not for themselves: and for the Lazarus at their door promise the illusion of a heaven beyond death.

Nathathanar paints, with no small restraint, the indigence of the minstrels with no promise of an ElDorado beyond, but of a relief from the gnawing pain of hunger and from their nakedness, should they seek the bounty of Nalliakkodan.

" Our unlit fire-place was cold as winter,
Its flooring was covered, dense and thick,
With a rich crop of mushrooms white and large ;
Our old and uncared-for walls were covered
With a network of gnawing white-ant nests ;
The bamboos of our thatch, for want of shackles,
Were falling one by one ; and our pet-dog,
That had newly littered, for very pain,
Barked sharp and short at the new-born blind-pups,
Of drooping ears, feeding at her dry breasts.
  The slender waist of the woman of th' house
Swayed with the pain of smiting hunger ;
The drum-girl, to the jingle of her conch-bangles,
Picked with unclept nails the greens on dust-shoot ;
And of it we cooked without salt, and shared,
Barring our kitchen-doors against the gaze,
Curious, of mean tell-tales and slanderers."

Did these minstrels return satisfied? Yes, they did, more than satisfied ; and never till the end of their lives did they know of hunger or nakedness. Again and again, in ancient Tamil-classics, we come across of such a generous gift by princes, kings, and chiefs. The white-umbrella of the ancient Tamil Kings was really a shelter for the subjects ; and what is it to-day in our own land?

"Now morning from her orient chamber came,
And her first footsteps touched a verdant hill:
Crowning its lawny crest with amber flame,
Silv'ring the untainted gushes of its rill;
Which, pure from mossy beds, did down distil,
And after parting beds of simple flowers,
By many streams a little lake did fill,
Which round its marge reflected woven-bowers,
And, in its middle space, a sky that never lowers.
There the kingfisher saw his plumage bright,
Vying with fish of brilliant dye below;
Whose silken fins, and golden scales' light
Cast upward, through the waves, a ruby glow:"

The lines quoted above are from Keats whose mission was to preach the truth of beauty and the beauty of truth; and we give below a few lines of Nathathanar.

"A sapphire-blue kingfisher was perch'd
On a branch of the thick-set Kanchi-tree,
Gleaming in flower-wreaths of orient dawn,
And gazed long into the fathomless depths
Of a tank, and flew off with a minnow,
Stenchy, flaming in its long golden bill;
Like the serpent Raghu round the full-moon,
The blue-bees of scarlet eyes hummed their songs,
For honey, round the morning pink flowers
Of the lotus-plant of long bristly stalks,
Whose green leaf was torn by the bill of th' bird,
As it carried away the Kayal-fish."

There is no word for word parallelism between the quotations, but both are rich in the colour of bird, flower, fish and tank. We leave

the rest to the imagination and the appreciation of discriminate readers.

"The lisping silver stream lay beaming, like
A necklace of pearls, between the fair firm breasts
Of Damsel-earth, whose shoulders, round and smooth,
Looked like bejewelled hills opulent with colours.
On the banks, falling with ramming waters
Of the fast-flowing stream, stood groves flaming
With perfume-filled flowers, colourful in hue.
Koels black and barred, she and he, tore the buds
From parent trees, and enamelled the bank,
Dark and rippled, with these fair petals.
And so, the dusky bank bespangled with these,
Frayed with the ascent of the sun, looked like
The outspread raven tresses of Damsel-earth."

* * * * *

"You will get these gifts of car, gold and cloth,
If you seek the warm hospitality
Of tender-leaf-crowned Nalliakkodan,
The lord of the hills, serried with forests
Of bamboo, of inaccessible heights,
And of paths made by roaring thunder strokes.
On these hills, canopied in fleecy clouds
Drizzling with rains, the peacocks spread their trains
Of iridescent colours, and strutted
With the jubilation of the showers.
This looked like sapphire-blue tresses, drying
In the Agila fume-clouds, of damsels
Of supple shoulders, and of willowy waists
Girdled in the folds of diaphànous Thugil."

Is it Titian or Millais? Or both rolled into one? What a glow of colours! What a detail of craftsmanship! Nathathanar paints with the

full and rich brush of Titian whose canvases glow with colours! Nathathanar paints with the brush of a careful craftsman like Millais of the preRaphaelite brotherhood.

The silver stream lay between shoulders of hills of opulent colours, and this is compared to a pearl necklace lying between the full, firm breasts of a damsel, and behind rise her shoulders like colourful, rounded hills.

The woodland-stream does not flow tamely, but fretting, fuming, foams furiously against the banks, silted with black ripples of sand. On either bank are the groves, which have donned their scarf of summer flowers; and they overflow with the perfume of flowers and with the interminable liquid note of Koels; and the golden rays of the orient sun lifts the mantle of morning mist, and reveals the grove in its glow of colours.

What is the other picture? Soft, fleecy clouds hover in a chaste sky over blue hills, and shoot down their arrows of silvery drizzle; the peacock's heart is filled with amour, it spreads its bejewelled train, does its dance steps and calls to its mate in its madrigalian note!

This is compared to a damsel, of supple shoulders and willowy waist mantled in misty garment, drying her dark-blue tresses in the fume-cloud of fragrant agila wood.

Both the canvases are supreme works of art. Reader! with your bride by your side stand in imagination before such a hill, river, and grove, and fill your heart with the music of love and perfume of service.

II

Mudathamakkanniar (முடத்தாமக்கண்ணியார்). She is a poetess of the Tamil-land, which has had other such women of talent and craftsmanship. She is the author of Porunar-artuppadai (பொருநராற்றுப்படை) of 248 lines; no other work of hers is extant. Her patron was Chera-king, Karikalan. We know nothing more of her life, though some stories have gathered around her. Besides her, Ovvai has left behind a large heritage of Tamil songs. There has been a confusion of more than one Ovvai, and it is for the student of research to sift one from the other.

For a comparison and an understanding of this poetess of the Tamil-country, we give below a few prose-translations of some of the woman-poets. *Ovvai* (ஔவை): She goes on a friendly mission from her patron-king—(Athiyaman-அதியமான்) to Thondaiman (தொண்டைமான்) of Thondaimandalam, and these quoted below are from 'The 400 Lay-songs'.

(P. N. 95) "Your (Thondaiman's) sharp lance-heads lie smeared with oil; and their

knotted staves are whole. Decked in peacock feathers and in garlands of flowers, they lie idle in your armoury of a wide gateway.

"But my King's (Athiyaman's) are broken and bent with ever smiting the enemy, and they ever lie in the armourer's shop to be mended.

"Such are the sharp lances of our imperial King Anchi (Anchi is another name for Athiyaman), who feeds endlessly, when in abundance, and when he has but little to give, he, the head of the indigent, shares with them what he has."

(P. N. 92) "The meaningless lisps of a child may not be sweet as a harp, may not have the rhythm of music to some, but they are melodious to the ears of a father.

"Oh, thou stately King Anchi—the destroyer of your enemy's fortifications—accept my songs to be as sweet as a child's."

("There is a touch of sly sarcasm in the first song. We seem to see before our mind's eye the old dame standing before Thondaiman with a sly smile on her face. What a masterly self-portrait with a few strokes of the brush!")

("Only those, whose ears have not been entuned to the rippling music of the lispings of a child, will say that the melody of the harp and the flute is sweet." This is from Valluvar's

Kural (66). Ovvai, in the second song quoted above has a similar sentiment, but this literary parallel is but a slender thread to hang a historical conclusion, that Ovvai and Valluvar were sister and brother.")

(P.N. 86) Kavarpendu (காவற்பெண்டு). (Like this poetess there are others who sing of heroic Tamil-mothers, and we give a few instances.)

" Holding fast to the adamantine pillar of my humble house, you ask, ' Where is your son ? '

" I know not where he may be. This, my womb which bore him, is now like a den of rocks deserted by a tiger ; and he, full sure, will be found in the field of war."

(" The mother says, ' you are holding fast to the adamantine pillar of my humble house ', meaning thereby, that though she was humble, her son, the pillar of the house, was adamantine in spirit. She is sure where her son would be.")

(P. N. 279) Masathiyar (மாசாத்தியார்).

" Let the confusion of my (poet's) mind cease. Her resolve, indeed, is great ; it is worthy of the daughter of warriors of ancient fame.

" In a past battle her brother lay, in the war-field, slain by a tusker. In the battle of yesterday her brother-in-law fell at the feet of an

array of tuskers which he sought to battle, and today, at the sound of war-drum, she is so delighted that she arms her son with a lance, clothes him in snow-white garment, anoints and combs his dishevelled hair, and bids him go with his face towards the field of battle.

"He is her only son! and she minds it not!"

(P. N. 252) Marpithiyar (மாற்பித்தியார்): (She sings of renunciation, but it is no song of praise.)

"Your complexion, fair as the silver stream of lisping waters, has faded!

"Now, crowned in mean matted locks brown like the leaves of Thillai-tree, you gather the dense leaves of Thali-creeper. Why?

"Then, you were the hunter who caught, in the net of your honey-sweet words, your home-loving spouse of peacock-gait. Has its charms fled!"

(P. N. 246) Perunkoppendu (பெருங்கோப் பெண்டு: (This is a Pandian Queen that sings before ascending her Lord's funeral pyre).

"You are indeed greatly wise! you are indeed greatly wise!

"Instead of helping me in my resolve to join my Lord, you have hit upon a ruse of stopping me from it! You are indeed greatly wise!

"There are widows who spurn the rice cooked in ghee, whose grains are like the tender

seeds which a scythe-cut reveals in the heart of a cucumber of squirrel-back lines, and, instead, partake of the strained cold-rice served in a leaf with the side-dishes of sesame-seed chutny, and Velai-green salad savoured with tamarind. I seek not such a widowhood.

"There are widows who, renouncing a mat, sleep on a bed of hard shingles. I seek not the lonely life of such a penance."

"To sleep on a funeral-pyre of the faggots of a darkling forest may be hard to you. But to me, who is bereaved of my Lord of towering shoulders, to lie on a funeral-pyre is as cool as sleeping in a water-filled tank of blooming lotuses of tender petals."

(Satee was in observance, in Tamil-land, in those distant times, but it was voluntary; and a Queen ascends the pyre!)

(P. No. 112) Pari's daughters (பாரி மகளிர்). This is an illustration of 'Our sweetest songs are of saddest thoughts.'

"On that night of a full silvery moon we had our father, and our land of towering hills that would not fall before the might of enemy.

"This night of a fair, full moon, we are orphaned of our Father-king and of our Fatherland."

Kanniar was not a rare exotic plant, but it is obvious, from the stanzas of other women of similar talent quoted above, that she was cradled in such a soil, and was nourished in such a tradition of a literary heritage. Hers, among poetesses, is the only poem of length that has come down to us. We do not know how many such previous poems fell a prey to the vandalism of fire and flood. Some may still be mouldering in the archives of misers of manuscript-collection! It may be, too, that many works of our ancient Tamil-poetesses perished at the jealous hands of rival-poets just as the lyrics and odes of Sappho —that flower of Greece, that child of Eros, and that pride of Hellas—were burnt by a Byzantine Emperor and a Roman Pope. Let the imagination of the reader picture an ancient Tamil-past, when culture was universal. Through unfortunate historical accidents, our Tamil-country has lapsed into total illiteracy, and today we spend much money on profitless, itinerant inspections, and much ink and paper is wasted in circulars and things, which are perfections of ambiguities, and which are visionless wooden tyrannies; while, with half the money half the people of our poor country can be made literate— not of that complexion whose highest literary achivement is to scribble their names. These are but vain regrets, and the future is gloomy,

for the threatening clouds of caste, colour, creed and language hang ominously over our heads.

Let us now pass on to a consideration, impartial, of the poem, and of the genius and gift of this Tamil-poetess of talent.

The poem opens with a description of the lyre-girl (minstrel-பாடினி) and the Tamilian harp (yazh-யாழ்). In the original there are 23 lines descriptive of the physical perfections of the fair-minstrel.

"In the swaying gait of a blue peacock,
Walked on the broad forest-road, vermeil-red,
The fair-minstrel of bright raven tresses
Like the black ripples of a river's sand bank;
Of a crescent-fair forehead beaming bright,
Of arched eye-brows like a smiting bow;
Of full, fathomless, and cool liquid-eyes;
Of lips carnation-tinted like coral,
Silken as leaves, tender, of silk-cotton tree,
And trembling in sweet melody of speech;
Of faultless teeth like a row of graded pearls;
Of ears, oval as the scissors' haft-rings,
And beaming in ear-rings' oscillations;
Of chaste neck bowed in maiden-modesty;
Of smooth, round shoulders curved like bamboo;
Of slender fingers pink as the petals
Of the Khanthal-flower of rising hills;
Of finger nails roseate as parrot's beak;
Of fair, firm breasts of swelling youthful charms,
Between which even a bristle could not pass,

And of a roseal-maculated fullness
To the smiting confusion of beholders;
Of a navel, round and deep like whirlpool;
Of waist too slender for sight and for touch;
Of round, rising hips decked in a bead-girdle
Beaming like blue, black and banded-bees;
Of thighs supple, lusty and full-well turned,
Tapering like the full, firm and round trunk
Of a cow-elephant stately of gait;
And, in unison with downy fore-legs,
Ended in a pair of well-modelled small feet,
Whose pink soles were like a tired dog's drooping
tongue."

The imaginative reader will picture to himself a Tamil-damsel, in the full bloom of womanhood, walking under a blazing sun. Because of the burning road she struts like a peacock, her tender feet are blistered, and she seeks even the uncertain shade of a leafless tree, to cool her feet which are covered with blisters which are like the coral coloured fruits of rock-aloe of yellow wavy lines. In but twenty-three lines Kanniar paints the physical perfections of a damsel cast in the beauty and grace of a Phidian marble. After fashioning such a figure of heroic proportions, she touches it with fire, bathes it in sunlight, tunes it to the chords of the lyre in her hand and to the cadences of her marching steps. We are reminded of 'Venus de Milos'—a statue—for more than one reason: firstly the description accords in every detail with that Greek-goddess, Aphrodite

or Wingless Victory; and secondly, if one is lucky one may meet, not one, but many damsels of such curves and undulations, round about modern Madura. Without a good illustration of Venus de Milos it is fruitless to enter into a comparison of it with Kanniar's creation; but should the reader come to possess a picture of it, he may verify the same curly tresses, chaste beaming forehead, firm full lips, rounded shoulders, full bosom, slender waist, lusty thighs and well-modelled feet.

In a stanza quoted above, Ovvai—the old dame—has painted a self-portrait, and we are greatly tempted to think that this is a self-portrait of Kanniar, carved not in marble, painted not in colour, but woven in words of singular music. While marble and canvas give us finished pictures, poetry has a limitless canvas, where many pictures may pass and repass suited to the complexion of our imagination, and herein lies the superiority of poetic art over other arts.

Is there not a touch of the flesh in Kanniar's picture? A touch of the flesh! Is there a touch of it in the Greek goddess by Praxiteles or Scopas? To the Greeks it was a perfect expression of their religion, where religion and art blended before her later degenerate days. And to-day religion, vitiated by misty and profitless theologies, philosophies and sanctimoniousnesses,

is divorced of art. Some visitors to Louvre, where this Goddess is templed, say that standing before this Greek-creation one is chastened, and leaves the art gallery without looking round lest the holiness be effaced from the tablets of their hearts. Our (Padini-பாடினி) fair-minstrel is no less a creation filling our hearts with sacred thoughts, for the very high-way men drop the weapons of their evil deeds at the stir of divine music on her harp. We are better than those highway men, for it was the same citadel of our mother's heart that nourished us with love and planted in our hearts the lily of purity. Just as the religion of the Greeks was incarnate in their arts, the religion of the Tamils was incarnate in her arts and life.

Such a woman, walking through the lonely forest-road with her lord, plays on her harp to the chastening confusion of highway-men. We give below the description of the harp (Tamil-yazh), as contained in the poem.

"The highway-men dropped their evil weapons,
Inimical to good, at the wakening
Of Palai-tune on the fair-minstrel's lyre,
Whose sound-box was cast in shape like a line
Of the hoof-moulds of the deer of woodlands;
And it was covered fast with the deer-robe,
Resplendent as flame, which at the knitting
Of its two halves was like a downy hair-line

Running down a beautiful maid's stomach.
The screw-pins gleamed like a crab's stalk-eyes, round
The rim of the wide mouth of the sound-box,
Shaped like the waxing moon of the eighth digit;
And the tall, erect post, fixed to the box,
Was fashioned fair as a hooded cobra,
'Gainst which was fastened the black-wood cross-beam,
Like a wristlet-covered, dusky forearm
Of a damsel; and the long, full-toned chords
Looked like a row of polished millet-grains;
And the minstrel waked to melody,
With her fingers, the slumbering chords
Of the music-muse templed harp, fair as bride,
And sang in sweet accord to the sweep, to the rove,
And to the flicking with fingers, the chords."

The harp (Yazh) was a stringed instrument, of varied shapes and of a varied number of strings, more popular with women than with men of the ancient Tamil-land. Here Kanniar describes it in its minutest detail, and how it was played. It may be that she herself was an adept in playing it; and the varied metre of the lines in her poems bears out that she had a keen ear for music; and besides she varied the metre lest its monotony should pall on the reader's ears. That music has its charms, and that it can melt even hearts of stone is borne out by its chastening influence on

the stony-hearted highway robbers. A modern musical-instrument maker should not find it hard to re-fashion the lyre of the ancient Tamils. Does not a feeling of wonder possess us, that poetry should be made to function as a craftsman's guide-book. The twenty descriptive lines are alive with the soft-toned music of the Yazh (harp), and that is ancient Tamil-poetry.

We can easily cite line after line illustrative of the music of the soft, rippling rhythm of Kanniar's poetry. We shall give but a few examples, in English garb, of the rhythm of her lines, where she varies her metre suited to the things that she describes.

"Into the placid, glassy, liquid lake flowed
The frothing, fretting, fuming waters' tide."

"The wide world girdled round by deep and dark seas,
Whose rising waves crash softly to spume mists,"

"'Thou, mighty smiter of furious foes,
We will leave for our homes' we whispered soft."

"Spurning the creamy breasts of the lioness,
And surging with rage like deadly Death-god,
The lion-cub strikes down the stately tusker."

It is not easy to pick and choose from a poem which teems with lines of melody and rhythm. We have given but a few instances.

(*a*) The angry tide flows into a placid lake; note the soft liquid sound of the first line and the turbidity of the second.

(*b*) Note the vastness contained in the first line and the soft crash of the waves.

(*c*) Note the mighty majesty of the king in the first line and the gentle leave-taking in the second.

(*d*) Note the hasty spurning of the mother's breast, and the seething anger of deadly attack.

The original is not poetry only but is also a piece of symphonious music! Who can achieve this but she whose ears are attuned to the music of harp (yazh)?

We next pass on to her 'confusion of climes' (திணைமயக்கம்). It is not a trick of the poetess. She is a native of Kaviri-poom-pattinam (காவிரிப் பூம்பட்டினம்), which is rich in sea-board (நெய்தல்) and agricultural (மருதம்) lands. The purpose of the poetess seems to be, that they are so intertwined that one cannot separate the one from the other, and she varies the metre in sweet accord with her theme.

"The jungle-fowl picked paddy,
And the home-fowl the millets;

"Hill Simpai bathed in seas,
And canal-cranes on hills nestled;

"The fishers sang hill-songs, and hillmen
Wore coronels of water-lily;

"Fishers sang the marutha songs
And agawars in pasture-lands wandered."

We shall here take leave of Kanniar, who, like Appollo, has given us lyre-lyrics, and who, like Phidias, has wrought for us marble-melodies.

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ERRATA

Page	*line*	*for*	*read*
22	19	forest land)	(forest land)
32	19	annouuced	announced
36 to 37	24 to 22 substitute M for K and K for M; Retain Kurinchi—lover = K; Mullai chief = M.		
38	12	mullai son	Kurinchi Lover
44	17	Queen,	Queens
45	5	chronologists	chronologists,
46	17	encampments	encampment
69	28	achivement	achievement

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